

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 TUNIS 06179 011653Z

43

ACTION AF-18

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 ISO-00 NEA-10 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07

H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01

SPC-03 SS-20 USIA-15 ACDA-19 IO-14 DRC-01 /165 W

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R 011535Z NOV 73

FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3577

INFO USINT ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY RABAT

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 6179

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, TS, XF

SUBJECT: CALL ON PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA: MIDDLE EAST DEVELOPMENTS

REF: TUNIS 6165 (NOTAL)

DEPARTMENT PASS CAIRO

1. DURING MY CALL ON PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA ON OCTOBER 31, HE EXPRESSED APPRECIATION FOR PRESIDENT NIXON'S CURRENT EFFORTS RE PEACE SETTLEMENT IN MIDDLE EAST. I ACKNOWLEDGED THAT PRESIDENT NIXON IS INDEED PLAYING ACTIVE ROLE AND HAD JUST RECEIVED REPRESENTATIVES OF SEVERAL STATES CONCERNED WITH THE DISPUTE. IN PARTICULAR, I MENTIONED VISIT OF EGYPTIAN FOREIGN MINISTER FAHMY. PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA SAID HE THOUGHT EGYPT HAD MADE A MISTAKE IN STARTING WAR WITHOUT BEING FULLY PREPARED. NOW IT HAS LITTLE TO SHOW FOR ITS EFFORTS, EXCEPT LOSS OF MANY LIVES. THE TROUBLE WITH ARAB GOVERNMENTS IN FACING UP TO ARAB-ISRAELI PROBLEM HAS BEEN THEIR LACK OF REALISM. THEY HAVE CONSISTENTLY BEEN TOO LATE IN RECOGNIZING FACTS: I.E., EXISTENCE OF ISRAEL. HE REFERRED TO HIS FAMOUS PRESS CONFERENCE

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 TUNIS 06179 011653Z

IN 1965 WHEN HE WAS VISITING PALESTINIAN REFUGEE CAMPS IN

JORDAN AND ON WHICH OCCASION HE HAD URGED ARABS TO RECOGNIZE ISRAEL AND MAKE PEACE. HE SAID THAT TUNISIAN TV WOULD SOON BE SHOWING TELEVISED TAPE OF THIS PRESS CONFERENCE -- TO SHOW HOW RIGHT HE HAD BEEN ALL ALONG.

2. THE PRESIDENT AGAIN EXPRESSED CONCERN OVER US-USSR DETENTE, SINCE HE BELIEVED IT WOULD FACILITATE SOVIET ADVANCES, ESPECIALLY IN MIDDLE EAST. I AGAIN SOUGHT TO EXPLAIN OUR POSITION, EMPHASIZING THAT THE U.S. IS WELL AWARE THAT USSR REMAINS A FORMIDABLE ADVERSARY BUT THAT WE HAVE AN HISTORIC OBLIGATION TO TRY TO WORK OUT A DETENTE. CONFRONTATION WOULD BE CATASTROPHIC AND, FURTHERMORE, A DETENTE OFFERS OPPORTUNITIES TO OPEN UP THE SOVIET SYSTEM TO WESTERN FREST AIR. I CONTINUED THAT IF CURRENT EFFORTS RESULT IN A RESOLUTION OF ARAB-ISRAELI PROBLEM, EVEN THOUGH IN TANDEM WITH SOVIETS, RECEPTIVITY FOR SOVIET INFLUENCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST WOULD RAPIDLY DIMINISH. BASICALLY, ARABS HAVE MUCH IN COMMON WITH U.S. AND WESTERN WORLD AND LITTLE IN COMMON WITH SOVIET SYSTEM. ARABS ARE FUNDAMENTALLY INDIVIDUALISTIC, THEY FIERCELY GUARD THEIR INDEPENDENCE; THEY SEEK WESTERN TECHNOLOGICAL KNOWHOW; AND THEY FIND PRIVATE ENTERPRISE CONGENIAL TO THEIR WAYS AND INTERESTS. SOVEIT SYSTEM AND AIMS CLASH WITH ALL OF FOREGOING FACTORS.

3. COMMENT: BOURGUIBA IS OBVIOUSLY PLEASED WITH CURRENT U.S. INITIATIVE AND WOULD WELCOME RESOLUTION OF ARAB-ISRAELI PROBLEM ON BASIS OF SC RESOLUTION 242 -- ASSUMING IT TAKES INTO ACCOUNT PALESTINIAN INTERESTS. DESPITE HIS CRITICISM OF EGYPT, I BELIEVE HE IS BASICALLY RELIEVED THAT SADAT ACTS MORE RATIONALLY THAN NASSER. (BOURGUIBA HAD NOT HAD OPPORTUNITY DIGEST SADAT'S SPEECH AT TIME OF OUR MEETING, BUTH OTHER TUNISIANS HAVE SINCE COMMENTED FAVORABLY ON ITS CONSTRUCTIVE TONE). BOURGUIBA'S LONGSTANDING OBSESSION WITH US-USSR DETENTE SEEMS TO FLOW FROM HIS FEAR THAT DETENTE MEANS LETTING DOWN OF U.S. "GUARD" AND TANGENTIALLY U.S. CONCERN FOR INTEGRITY OF SMALL STATES LIKE TUNISIA. ARGUMENTS TO THE CONTRARY HAVE APPARENTLY AS YET MADE LITTLE IMPACT ON HIM.

SEELYE

NOTE BY OC/T: NOT PASSED CAIRO.

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PAGE 03 TUNIS 06179 011653Z

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